



May 27, 2014

KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-14-39

SUBJECT: LTP–Environmental Quality Incentives Program–Fiscal Year 2014 National Organic Initiative

Action required by: June 20, 2014 (Field Offices [FOs])

Action required by: July 18, 2014 (Area Offices [AOs])

Action required by: June 6, 2014 (State Office [SO])

Purpose. To provide guidance for administering the fiscal year (FY) 2014 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) National Organic Initiative (NOI)

Expiration Date. September 30, 2015

This bulletin replaces Bulletin KS300-14-20. Action required by dates, contact information, and the distribution list have been updated.

Background

Through the EQIP NOI, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will assist eligible producers with installation of conservation practices (CPs) to treat resource concerns on agricultural operations related to organic production. The NRCS has determined that this definition includes certified organic producers and producers who are transitioning to become certified organic. Eligible applicants also include producers who fall under the exemption category in the National Organic Program (NOP) regulation.

Organic Certification Requirements

- The EQIP organic initiative self-certification worksheet for FY2014 (Attachment 3) shall be used by each producer applying for EQIP NOI assistance.
- Certified organic producers must self-certify (Attachment 3) that they are a certified organic producer and provide the NRCS with a copy of their Organic System Plan (OSP) prior to application approval and organic certification must be maintained for the life of the contract.

(more)

DIST: A, F, S, C. Nelson, Volkman

Natural Resources Conservation Service
760 South Broadway Boulevard
Salina, Kansas 67401-4604

Phone: 785-823-4500
FAX: 855-533-5070
www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov

- Transitioning to organic, producers must self-certify (Attachment 3) that they agree to develop and implement an OSP and provide the NRCS the contact information of the applicant's U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) accredited organic certifying agent before an EQIP contract can be approved.
- Organic producers selling less than \$5,000 a year in organic agricultural products are exempt from organic certification. Exempt organic producers are eligible for the EQIP NOI. Applications should be ranked with certified organic producers provided that they self-certify that they agree to develop and implement an OSP.
- Payments for CPs for the NOI are limited to \$20,000 per FY and \$80,000 during the 6 rolling years of a Farm Bill.
- Additional information about the NOP and organic certification requirements administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) can be found at www.ams.usda.gov/nop.

Eligible Land Uses, Resource Concerns, and CPs

The eligible land uses, resource concerns, and CPs are available in Attachment 1.

The following Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) is offered as part of the NOI for transitioning to organic applications.

- Conservation Plan Supporting Organic Transition (138)

Screening Criteria

No screening criteria is used to support this initiative.

Program Contracts System (ProTracts) Ranking Tool

The ProTracts fund code for certified organic applications and exempt organic applications is "FY14 Certified Organic."

The ProTracts fund code for transitioning to organic applications and applications including CAP (138) is "FY14 Organic Transition."

National ranking questions are consistent for all EQIP applications; however, only questions 1a, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 5a, 5b, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, 7e, 7f, 9a, 9b, and 9c apply to the NOI. All other national questions shall be answered "No." Refer to bulletin KS300-14-16 for additional guidance on answering national questions.

A copy of the state and local ranking questions are provided in Attachment 2.

Applications including a CAP will have significant ranking priority by receiving the total maximum points available in the ranking process. If application is made for a CAP, then question 1 for each of the national, state, and local ranking questions will be answered "Yes" and all remaining national, state, and local ranking questions will be answered "No."

The ProTracts application type of “plan-organic” must be associated with each CAP application and ranking of these applications is required in FY2014.

NOTE: CAPs require the use of a Technical Service Provider (TSP) to complete a conservation plan. See electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG) Section III, Conservation Activity Plans Technical Criteria, for CAP requirements.

All eligible applications shall be entered into the Conservation Programs Geographic Information System Interface (CPGI). All answers available on the CPGI report will be used to answer the corresponding question on the ProTracts Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT). The application identification number in CPGI will match the application identification number from ProTracts.

Deadlines

Although applications for EQIP are accepted continuously, there were two FY2014 application evaluation period cutoff dates for NOI applications: February 21, 2014, and April 18, 2014. Guidance for the second cutoff period will be in bulletin KS300-14-41.

FOs completed conservation plans and application rankings on May 16, 2014.

AOs completed peer reviews of rankings on May 23, 2014.

The SO Programs Staff will make funding decisions by June 6, 2014.

FOs will have all approved applications and documentation entered in electronic contracts (eContracts) for second level review by June 20, 2014.

Assistant state conservationists for field operations (ASTCs-FO) will ensure that all contracts have been obligated in ProTracts by July 18, 2014.

Practice Clarification

As in previous years, the maximum eligibility extent for CP 798 Seasonal High Tunnel System for Crops, payment shall be 2,178 square feet (sq. ft.) per **agricultural operation** for the duration of the interim practice pilot which has been extended one year. This may be single or multiple structures for a maximum of 2,178 sq. ft. coverage. Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 502, Section 502.0, defines an agricultural operation as “. . . a parcel or parcels of land whether contiguous or noncontiguous, constituting a cohesive management unit for agricultural purposes.”

NOTE: When participants with cropped land sign up for Irrigation System, Micro-Irrigation and do not have the required Division of Water Resources (DWR) reports or Farm Service Agency (FSA) records verifying that they have met the two out of the last five years irrigation requirement, they will need to provide the FO with adequate documentation of irrigation history. The supervisory district conservation (SDC) or district conservationist (DC) will use his/her best professional judgment and document their decision in the case file.

Contact: Please forward questions through established channels, to Chad G. Volkman, Resource Conservationist, at chad.volkman@ks.usda.gov or call (785)823-4568.

(Signed)

ERIC B. BANKS
State Conservationist

Attachments